

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion, as well as the right to practice and change one's religion or belief. The law decriminalizing marijuana for any use also recognizes the government's responsibility to uphold the religious rights of persons of the Hindu and Rastafari faiths.

During the year, the government continued its COVID-19 vaccine mandate for all public sector and government workers and students older than 12. In response to objections by some religious leaders, the government allowed religious exemptions to vaccination. Some members of the Rastafarian community said police targeted them for transporting cannabis, although transporting cannabis between private residences and private places of worship is permitted under the law.

In September, officials at a private school denied admittance to a five-year-old Rastafarian pupil because she was wearing her hair in traditional Rastafarian locks, contrary to the school's dress code. The government stated the action was discriminatory.

U.S. embassy officials met with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development, as well as leadership of the interdenominational Christian Council and Rastafarian leaders, to highlight the importance of freedom of religion and the value of religious diversity in contributing to society. The embassy also recognized the celebration of diverse religious holidays throughout the year and sent messages highlighting the commemoration of U.S. National Religious Freedom Day and International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 100,335 (midyear 2022). According to the 2011 census, the most recent, 17.6 percent of the population are Anglican, 12.4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 12.2 percent Pentecostal, 8.3

percent Moravian, 8.2 percent Roman Catholic, and 5.6 percent Methodist. Those with unspecified or no religious beliefs account for 5.5 percent and 5.9 percent of the population, respectively.

Members of the Baptist Church, the Church of God, and the Wesleyan Holiness Consortium each account for less than 5 percent of the population. The census categorizes an additional 12.2 percent of the population as belonging to other religious groups, including Rastafarians, Muslims, Hindus, and Baha'is, without providing percentages for each group. Based on anecdotal information, these four religious groups are listed from largest to smallest.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of thought and religion, as well as the right to change and practice one's religion or belief. The constitution protects individuals, without their consent, from taking oaths, receiving religious instruction, and participating in religious events contradictory to their beliefs. These rights may be limited in the interests of defense or public safety, order, morality, or health, or to protect the rights of others, unless actions under such limitations can be shown "not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society." The constitution prohibits members of the clergy from running for elected office. No law may be adopted that contradicts these constitutional provisions. The government does not enforce a law outlawing blasphemous language in a public place or any other place that would "cause annoyance to the public."

Religious groups must register with the government to receive tax- and duty-free concessions and to own, build, or renovate property. To register, religious groups must fill out an online tax form that describes the group's activities. The government uses this form to determine the group's tax status. The Inland Revenue Department reviews and approves the completed form, usually granting registration and tax concessions.

The law prohibits religious instruction in public schools. Private schools may provide religious instruction. While public schools require parents to immunize

their children to attend school, some private schools do not require immunizations for their students. The law permits homeschooling.

The law decriminalizing marijuana for any use also recognizes the government's responsibility to uphold the religious rights of persons of the Hindu and Rastafari faiths. The law allows these persons to apply for a special religious license to cultivate the plant within their private dwelling, use the plant for religious purposes within their private dwelling or within their approved place of worship, and transport the plant between their private dwelling and approved places of worship. The special religious license, however, does not permit any commercial or financial transaction involving any part of the cannabis plant.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

During the year, the government continued its COVID-19 vaccine mandate for all public sector and government workers and students over age 12. The government allowed religious exemptions, which some adherents sought, especially from the Rastafari faith. Some religious groups, including some Christian groups, however, continued to object to the government's vaccination requirement.

Media outlets reported some Rastafarians with licenses to cultivate cannabis complained that police targeted them for arrest for transporting cannabis, which the law permitted between private residences and private places of worship.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In September, officials at a private school denied admittance to a five-year-old Rastafarian pupil, after she had been accepted as a student, because she was wearing her hair in traditional Rastafarian locks, contrary to the school's dress code. According to media outlets, the incident resulted in a heated public debate on religious freedom and expressions of religious identity. The government and some members of the public said the school's action was discriminatory, and the government stated it condemned any school that did not allow students to wear

their hair according to their family's religious beliefs. Other members of the public said if parents choose to send their child to a religious school, it was their responsibility to abide by the rules of the school rather than to impose their religious beliefs. By year's end, the pupil had transferred to another school.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development representatives to highlight the importance of promoting freedom of religion and the value of religious diversity in society. Embassy officials also met with leaders of the interdenominational Christian Council, the Syrian diaspora (who are primarily Christian), and the Rastafarian community to discuss religious diversity and tolerance.

The embassy maintained social media engagement on religious freedom issues. The embassy also recognized the celebration of diverse religious holidays throughout the year and posted messages commemorating U.S. National Religious Freedom Day and International Holocaust Remembrance Day.